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ABSTRACT

This issue of "Media & Values" explores the influence of mass media on the perceptions about cultural pluralism and ethnic diversity in society. The essays present various interpretations of that influence and the implications for the society. Articles include: (1) "Promoting Pluralism" (Joseph Giordano; Irving M. Levine); (2) "Does TV Shape Ethnic Images?" (S. Robert Lichter; Linda S. Lichter); (3) "Covering Conflict: How the News Media Handles Ethnic Controversy" (Ira Rifkin). Articles in "Ethnic Perspectives: An Issue Forum' section include (1) "Bottom Line Still Tops" (Gene Reynolds); (2) "I'll Be Home for Hanukkah" (Rosalind Silver); (3) "Making Waves: Pressure Groups and the Media" (Brian Levine); and (4) "A Century of Abuse" (Allen L. Woll). Articles in the "Reflection/Action" section are (1) "Women: Dose of Reality Spices TV Lives" (Sally Steenland); (2) "Pastoring: Stereotypes Back? It's No Joke" (Peter Paulsen); (3) "Children: Varied Images Teach Lesson in Pluralism" (Judith Myers-Walls); (4) "Social Justice: Daily Habits Stymie Diversity" (Donna Demac); (5) "Minorities: Media Play Role Bridging Cultures" (Carlos Cortes); (6) "Global Scene: World Market is New Reality" (Keval Joseph Kumar) and (7) "Family Life: 'Tossed Salad' Culture Honors Diversity" (Helen H. Graham Burns). (EH)

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Media&Values

A Quarterly Resource for Media Awareness

Spring 1988 Number 43

ED 407 356

ETHNIC DIVERSITY:
Challenging the Media

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Media&Values

is a unique resource to stimulate awareness, creative thinking and reflective action on the media issues of our time. As a magazine, *Media&Values* came early to the recognition that emerging media and new technology — from computers to video to satellites — could bind or separate human beings, but would leave no one unchanged.

"Recognizing that the media environment in which we live is a major agent of socialization and directly affects the quality of life for individuals and the society at large, our purpose is to challenge and enable both media consumers and media industries to raise questions about and to claim greater responsibility for that media environment."

— Statement of Purpose

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Spring 1988

Number 43

STARTING POINT

We all come from somewhere.

A keen memory from my childhood was visiting Aunt Margaret's house where we children could swing on the front gate while the grown-ups sat on the porch tracing the exploits of our Tennessee family back to before the Revolutionary War.

Unlike many other families in this country, their memories did not include a trip through Ellis Island. But the cultural heritage of Appalachia is a gift I treasure — along with a fondness for swings.

As we go to press, the issue of cultural pluralism and ethnic identity is surfacing in headlines nearly every day. Awareness of the media's role in defining, imaging, reflecting and reporting these issues is growing among media-makers and media consumers alike.

We are proud to be on the cutting-edge of this discussion and to contribute this issue of *Media&Values* to the current public debate. Many thanks to the Institute for American Pluralism of the American Jewish Committee for a major grant to develop the issue as well as invaluable help in outlining the questions to be raised and locating relevant research.

We are pleased that the AJC plans to distribute this issue as a background resource to all participants of The 2nd National Consultation on Ethnic America, June 22-24, 1988 at Fordham University. We hope other organizations will follow their example with quantity orders for mailings, conferences, committees or classes. Low-cost quantity prices for this issue (and other recent ones as well) can be found inside the back cover.

•

One cannot complete an issue on ethnic diversity without recommending as a model our neighbor to the north: Canada. Their national policy of promoting "visible minorities" makes every city and social institution, including the media, a rich and varied ethnic experience.

Much too late in the editorial process, we realized we might have had an article on Canadian broadcasting or on the great National Film Board of Canada. Well... another issue, another time.

Elizabeth Thoman

Executive Editor

ETHNIC DIVERSITY:
Challenging the Media

From Howard Beach to Hollywood, from Detroit to Dallas, concern for the authentic depiction and accurate coverage of ethnic minorities is challenging the way the media handles both news and entertainment. Stereotypes remain, but a positive pluralism is clearly the trend.

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NEXT ISSUE

Elections: *Democracy in an Electronic Era*

The media's impact on the democratic process seems to be more far-reaching with each election. As the fall political campaign heats up, the pundits, pollsters and media experts writing in the upcoming issue ask: "Does the voter still count?"

PROMOTING PLURALISM

Conflict remains, but ethnic groups and the media are beginning to work together.

By Joseph Giordano and Irving M. Levine

The depiction of ethnic characters in the media has been the subject of hot debate for decades. The feeling still exists among leaders of many ethnic groups that very little has changed in the negative and stereotyped way they are portrayed. On the other hand, media managers believe that they have become more culturally sensitive and often view the demand of ethnic groups as out of touch with the realities of the industry. The truth lies somewhere in the middle.

Unquestionably, more minority and ethnic characters and scenes can be seen than in the days of *Father Knows Best* and *Ozzie and Harriet*. But TV programs and films are still marred by the low visibility of certain groups and the stereotyping of others.

While the news media played an important role in the 1960s by vividly documenting in pictures the struggle for civil rights, today too many radio and TV stations deliberately try to hype ratings by showcasing extremists and bigots. Their appearance often works to increase tensions between ethnic groups. Today's media are rarely as crude in depicting ethnic groups as greeting cards and "truly tasteless" joke books, and the stereotypes that occur are presented in a more sophisticated form. Nevertheless, they do reinforce bigotry.

Is change hopeless? We think not. In spite of this long and somewhat negative history we do think that the time is ripe for positive changes.

Creative cooperation between media professionals and ethnic groups may now be more propitious than ever. The following combination of factors lead us to that conclusion:

• A number of ugly racial confrontations in the past few years — e.g., in Howard Beach, New York, and Forsyth County, Georgia — may have served the same function as the urban riots of the 1960s: to remind Americans of how deep the racial divisions are in this country, how explosive they can be, and the important role the media can play in reducing or enlarging those tensions.

• Historical, sociological and psychological research continues to show that ethnic ties are far more than an immigrant phenomenon; rather, they help shape an individual's character and personal story line for generations beyond immigration. Conversely, individuals who deny or are cut off from their ethnic identities often suffer lowered self esteem.

• Whether we're talking about new technology like 100-plus-channel TV and VCRs or growing ethnic outlets like minority television outlets and ethnic

magazines, the growth of the media provides more forms for media expression.

• Mass media programming, particularly TV, is becoming more authentic, both in terms of the variety of characters shown (as in the colorful ethnic, as well as gender and class, interactions of *Cagney and Lacey*, *St. Elsewhere*, *thirtysomething* and *Hill Street Blues*) and in the presentation of such once-taboo topics as spouse abuse and teenage suicide. As the networks learned in such mini-series as *Roots* and *Holocaust*, delving into an ethnic group's story can make for programming that is educationally enriching, dramatically compelling and commercially profitable.

• In the area of news coverage, radio and TV stations are becoming more self-critical than in the past, as evidenced by the presence of such articulate inside critics as Bill Moyers, and the number of stations that have initiated and maintained regular contact with ethnic group leaders.

• The emergence of a new generation of writers, such as Maxine Hong Kingston, Richard Rodriguez and Paul Cowan (respectively, Chinese-, Mexican-, and Jewish-American) are providing the mass media with a greatly expanded pool of story ideas. Each ethnic group has a rich history and folk tradition which the mass media barely have begun to plumb.

"More authentic portrayals of our lives can be presented by the media in all their ethnic particularity. In fact, prime time shows with authentic ethnic themes have received high ratings."

Irving Levine

Both media professionals and ethnic group leaders will benefit if they take advantage of this new climate by reaching out to each other.

For their part, media leaders should recognize that there is a real audience for programs and films that portray a fully pluralist America. Such TV series as *The Cosby Show*, *L.A. Law*, *Frank's Place*, *A Year in the Life*, and films including *La Bamba* and *The Color Purple* already show that there is a substantial audience for "real" — stereotype-breaking and ethnically diverse — characters.

Authenticity becomes even more important in light of Lichter and Lichter's study (1988) of how adolescents react to ethnic characters on prime time TV shows (see story on p. 5). They view the characters as typical of the groups they represent. Therefore, TV programs must involve not only a certain variety of non-stereotyped ethnic characters but, more positively, characters who reflect the values and styles of their traditions.

Segments on *thirtysomething*, *A Year in the Life* and *L. A. Law* deal with meaningful feelings about intermarriage. For example, when the Christian mother on *A Year in the Life* first refuses to participate in the Jewish naming ritual but then talks alone to her infant daughter about her Hebrew name, we experience her conflict.

New Dimensions

Media leaders generally have viewed ethnic America as consisting of pressure groups. A new, more sympathetic perspective on American pluralism means perceiving its groups as resources, both in terms of creative personnel and story ideas.

It would involve reaching out to attract and help train directors, producers, writers, actors, camera people and other personnel from many ethnic backgrounds. For example, the major TV networks and PBS might sponsor contests, with significant cash awards, or the best original plays on ethnic America. Schools of communication and film, as well as TV and radio stations and film companies, also should consider including curricula on "The Ethnic Dimension of News and Entertainment" in their base training and continuing-education programs.

"We used to spend so much time telling ourselves this country was a melting pot. Celebrating and understanding our differences is equally important."

Robin Reisig,
editor, *Newsday*

The most concrete contribution the mass media can make is to develop, and adhere to, guidelines for good ethnic programming and news coverage. Some examples are to present characters who speak in correct accents, to avoid negative stereotypes (the "dumb Pole," "drunk Irishman," "inscrutable Chinese" or

"Italian gangster"), to cover racial or other intergroup tensions in a way that fairly and knowledgeably covers each side's interests and avoids stoking intergroup tensions. News coverage in particular should avoid giving the most coverage to the most extreme, hate-mongering views.

Reaching Out

For their part, ethnic group leaders also need to adopt a less adversarial stance toward the media. Before complaining about coverage of their group or otherwise engaging in advocacy, they must come to understand how the media work, and the complex structural, commercial, creative and social dynamics to which they are subjected. When it comes to TV, for example, they need to understand how many individuals are involved in covering a news story or shaping a series, and how the intense ratings wars affect programming. For better or worse, the media are comprised of businesses (whose primary focus is what will enhance the bottom line).

Appreciating the corporate dimension of the mass media does not mean that ethnic advocates should not, or cannot, influence them. But it does imply that they must develop the interpersonal, public relations and other skills to ensure their being heard.

Part of this process is to know not only when to challenge, but also when to support. Rather than simply complain, ethnic leaders should applaud quality programming involving ethnic content. They should do so particularly when a station or film company has taken a risk with material that previously was considered parochial or "too controversial."

"Ethnicity is values, beliefs, family. It is a way of seeing the world that is passed on through generations. We all need roots as well as wings, a balance between our traditions and our individuality."

Joseph Giordano

Ethnic America also has an obligation to promote such risk-taking, to broaden horizons and confront stereotypes, by educating media corporations.

At the same time, if ethnic leaders want media executives to tap their creative resources, they have the obligation to develop their resources to the fullest. Ethnic groups in America must more adequately support their own writers, artists or filmmakers. They need to undertake comprehensive, well-organized oral history projects and have at least one museum documenting that group's story in both the "old country" and in America. Many groups do all of these things, but don't adequately connect with media representatives who might be convinced to take seriously the material that is available for good authentic programming.

Finally, ethnic groups would comprise a more potent force in influencing the media if they entered into coalitions rather than going it alone. The more extensive experience of some groups (for example, Jews and blacks) in what has been called "the art and science of influence" could benefit other groups, while the strength of *all* groups would be enhanced by a sharing of expertise.

Ultimately, the goal of such coalition-building within ethnic America is not to confront the media but to build bridges to it. For ethnic America and the mass media need each other. Each group in this country needs to be seen and to be portrayed fairly, by the major channels of communication in order to get its message across to the general American public. Conversely, the mass media, which are ever in danger of being stale in their entertainment programing and superficial or inaccurate in their news coverage, need to utilize ethnic diversity as an inexhaustible source of creative renewal.

Joseph Giordano, a family therapist, is director of the American Jewish Committee's Center on Ethnicity, Behavior and Communications and is co-chairman of the Italian American Foundation's Media Institute. Irving M. Levine, a major leader of the "new ethnicity" movement, is the American Jewish Committee's Director of National Affairs and the founder/director of AJC's Institute of American Pluralism.

Re:Action

Hate on the Air Exploits Extremism

Bigotry. Hatred. Intolerance.

From shock radio to network interview shows, computer bulletin boards to "dial-a-bigot" telephone services, extremists crowd the airwaves with their inflammatory ideas — and ratings-conscious talk-show hosts often egg them on.

First Amendment restrictions prohibit censorship, but such messages of hate need not be tolerated. In fact, they can and must be stopped.

"Surround them," is the message of the American Jewish Committee and other groups, who urge local monitoring and feedback as well as organized efforts to explode prejudice with balanced programming.

Some ideas for countering bigotry:

- Demand equal time to present your side when groups in your community are slurred. On computer services, provide alternative messages.
- Establish regular relationships with media managers to establish policies designed to defuse on-air bigotry.
- Call meetings between media leaders and representatives of ethnic, racial, religious and civic organizations to discuss the proper role of the media in dealing with extremism.
- Present program ideas that feature positive and balanced treatment of ethnic and racial issues and local controversies related to ethnicity.
- Challenge the fitness of hatemongers to hold FCC licenses.

Feedback should be presented in ways that do not dignify the agents of hate. But it must be made clear to station managers and others that the public airwaves belong to all people, and thus cannot be used to malign ethnic groups under the guise of free expression and to the financial benefit of media ownership.

DOES TV SHAPE ETHNIC IMAGES?

Research reveals Howard Beach youth test positive to ethnic characters.

By S. Robert and Linda S. Lichter

The landscape from *Amos 'n' Andy* to *The Cosby Show* is littered with ethnic shows and characters who have entertained audiences and troubled anti-defamation groups. A long line of Italian mafiosi, black servants and Hispanic banditos, to name a few stereotypes, have attracted condemnation from community organizations. Yet surprisingly little is known about how audiences react to such characters. Much of the concern is directed at young people. Do they see ethnic characters as either positive or negative role models, as real people or mere figments of fantasy?

Black and Italian-American parents might be startled at the thought of George Jefferson or Taxi's Louis DePalma as role models for their children. Even more startling is the notion that these characters are accepted as typical of blacks and Italians.

To find out, we asked over 1,200 students at a public high school in the Howard Beach area of Queens in New York City about their attitudes towards race and ethnicity in real life and on television. The school was chosen because it contained a multi-ethnic population, with large numbers of black, Hispanic, and Italian-American students, and smaller groups of Irish and Asian descent. Two months after the survey was completed during the fall of 1986, this obscure Queens school suddenly became the fo-

cus of unwanted national attention when several of its students were charged with murder following a racial attack. Suddenly, the study was also about race relations in Howard Beach.

The results provide some reassurance that the attack did not necessarily reflect widespread racial antagonism. Most members of the racial and ethnic groups surveyed say they are willing to invite those from other ethnic groups into their homes. Negative stereotypes are the exception rather than the rule, although about one in three students holds negative images of blacks and Italian Americans. But negative images of other groups as "lazy," "stupid," "violent," etc., are often balanced by those who held positive images of the same groups as "friendly," "kind," "honest," and the like.

Any expression of negative stereotyping or ethnic prejudice is grounds for concern and condemnation, but it was a relief to find that such attitudes were not pervasive.

Creating Reality

Even so, there was enough mutual suspicion and intolerance to lend urgency to the question of television's role in forming or reinforcing ethnic attitudes. Television is a major part of these students' lives, accounting for a substantial portion of their leisure time. Two out of five watch television over four hours a day, and one in six watches at least six hours daily.

Students said they watched television primarily as a vehicle for entertainment but also as a learning tool and a point of entry into the wider world.

More importantly, many regard television as a learning tool and an accurate reflection of the real world. Forty percent say they learn a lot from TV, and one in four agree that "TV shows what life is really like," and "people on TV are like real life."

Interestingly, the different ethnic groups tended to watch television for somewhat different reasons. Black students were the heaviest TV watchers and were also the group most likely to use television as a learning tool. Of these students, over half said they learn a lot from TV and one-third said it teaches them things they don't learn in school. In light of these findings, it is perhaps not surprising that blacks were also the group most likely to see television as a reflection of real life.

At the other end of the spectrum, Jewish students were least likely to see this correspondence between TV and the real world. The findings suggest that young people in different ethnic groups vary in their susceptibility to the various appeals of TV entertainment and the use to which they put information they gain from watching television. Yet, these ethnic variations do not change the fact that, overall, a surprising number of teenagers see the fantasy factory as a mirror of reality.

Role Models

For many, this linkage between real life and TV's version of life is relevant to their perceptions of race and ethnicity. About one-third of those with an opinion say that the ethnic characters they see on television affect their attitudes toward ethnic groups in real life. If many young people admit that their ethnic perspectives flow partly from television, then their opinions of TV characters take on a special importance. We asked them to rate a list of twenty ethnic characters ranging from *Cosby's* Cliff Huxtable to George Jefferson, from *Hill Street's* heroic Frank Furillo to *Taxi's* tiny tyrant Louis DePalma, and from the Jewish Lieutenant Samuels of *Cagney and Lacey* to the Asian Detective Yemana of *Barney Miller*. The ratings were based on two scales: how favorably the students regarded the various characters and how "typical" they considered them to be of their respective ethnic groups.

The result? The students view virtually all these characters not only in positive terms but as typical members of their ethnic group. This was true whether or not the students themselves were members of the character's ethnic group. There was a general tendency to rate characters from one's own group favorably, but responses to the characters themselves often seemed to override any loyalties to ethnic groups.

Again, however, ethnic variations did exist within these general trends. Black students not only responded very favora-

TELEVISION'S TEACHINGS:

Strange New World Lurks Behind the Tube

Is television a learning tool and an accurate reflection of the real world? Here are some examples of the major findings in the Lichters' study:

1. **Many students see television entertainment as realistic.**
   - 40 percent of those surveyed say they learn a lot from TV.
   - 25 percent say TV shows what life is really like.
   - 24 percent say people on TV are like real life.
2. **Blacks, more than any other group, use TV to learn about life.**
   - 51 percent say they learn a lot from TV.
   - 30 percent say the same things happen in TV and real life.
   - 23 percent identify often with ethnic TV characters.
3. **Television influences the positive images of ethnic groups in real life.**
   - 26 percent say TV influences their racial and ethnic attitudes.
   - The more students like TV characters, the more they regard them as typical of their ethnic group.
4. **Ratings of television characters cut across racial lines.**
   - Television's black characters received the most favorable ratings, even among non-black students.
   - Italian characters are rated as most typical of their real-life ethnic group by both Italian and non-Italian students.
   - All ethnic characters received favorable ratings.
   - Jewish students respond most positively to ethnic characters across the board.

Source: ***Television and Ethnic Images Among Howard Beach Youth***

Why Students Watch Television

Most students spend a large portion of their free time in front of the set. But their reasons for finding the time worth spending vary widely.

	Asian	Black	Latino	Jewish	Italian	Irish	All
It brings my family together	18 %	23 %	20 %	10 %	14 %	13 %	18 %
I learn a lot from it	35	51	36	24	28	31	40
It shows how others solve problems I have	41	38	36	31	34	27	37
I get to know different people	35	42	33	24	26	27	34
Teaches things I don't learn in school	26	32	26	16	17	11	27
Shows what life is really like	29	28	27	14	19	13	25
I learn how to act	9	12	11	2	7	2	10
It keeps me from being bored	94	86	78	86	88	89	85

Source: From Television and Ethnic Images Among Howard Beach Youth

bly to ethnic characters in general, they were also most likely to regard these characters as typical of real-life groups. By contrast, Jewish students were least likely to see these characters as reflecting reality, even though they responded to them most positively. Generally, each group of students rated as most typical characters of their own ethnic background, suggesting that television may affect ethnic self-perception more than images of other groups.

So the good news is that young people have positive feelings about TV's ethnic characters, and these associations may carry over into their images of real life groups. The bad news is that their positive identifications extend to less than exemplary characters. Black and Italian-American parents might be startled at the thought of George Jefferson or Louis DePalma as role models for their children. Even more startling is the notion that these characters are widely accepted as "typical" of blacks and Italians respectively.

Yet the study suggests that the continuing appearance of an ethnic character, whether positive or negative, may legitimize him or her as an individual worthy of admiration, if not emulation. The results also show, however, that the more positive or favorable the response to a TV character, the more likely that the student sees the character as typical of his or her ethnic group. Thus, TV may influence ethnic stereotyping mainly *by encouraging viewers to identify the positive traits of television characters with the ethnic groups they represent.*

Portrayal Power

Television's power to legitimize character and behavior may exceed the intentions of its creators. This is reminiscent of some troubling findings that emerged from studies of *All in the Family*. When Norman Lear made Archie Bunker a lovable bigot, he took care to portray Archie's biases as reprehensible. The idea was to get viewers to laugh at his bigotry, to attack intolerance with ridicule. But surveys showed that intolerant viewers *identified* with Archie and allowed his sentiments to reinforce their own.

TV's tendency to create its own consensus seems to justify the often-expressed concern of America's racial and ethnic groups about the way they are portrayed in television entertainment. There is ample cause for concern. While research shows that television holds no magical power to change firmly held beliefs, it can add powerful reenforcement to attitudes already held. For example, one study demonstrated that prejudiced viewers see Archie Bunker as an admirable character. It is only those with more tolerant attitudes who realize that Archie is actually the focus of humorous disapproval.

This role of television as a reinforcer and crystallizer of existing attitudes is significant even if few people actually form their opinions of cultures or races based on what they see on TV. If the audience views certain ethnic and racial groups in a negative manner and television portrayals confirm those images, then TV entertainment may be reassuring those people that their images of certain ethnic and racial groups as foolish, lower class, inarticulate, or criminal are correct.

Many have also expressed concern that negative stereotypes may particularly affect the members of those groups portrayed by giving them a negative self-image. The absence or low status of their television counterparts may encourage them to limit their own aspirations. Surveys also show that many people actually admit to using TV to guide them in their own social and personal situations. This dependence on television as an educational tool for living is particularly strong for those with little education.

Television exercises its greatest power over those who do not hold strong opinions or who have no opinion or information about a particular topic or group of people. Here television may be playing a vital informational role. In dealing with a variety of socially relevant topics such as racial and ethnic relations, TV not only entertains, it conveys values and messages that people may absorb unintentionally. This is particularly the case with young people.

S. Robert and Linda S. Lichter are co-directors of the Center for Media and Public Affairs in Washington, D.C. Dr. Robert Lichter is DeWitt Wallace fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

COVERING CONFLICT

How the News Media Handles Ethnic Controversy

By Ira Rifkin

In the fall of 1968, I was a wire service reporter in New York City covering the lengthy public school teachers' strike called over the forced transfer of white instructors by a black-dominated local community school board.

The strike was a divisive one and demonstrations were the order of the day in Brooklyn's Ocean Hill-Brownsville area, the focus of the dispute. Demonstrations often turned violent, and when they did the police and blacks each blamed the other for starting them.

I witnessed one demonstration that ended with rocks and bottles being thrown after club-swinging police had waded into a crowd of demonstrating blacks to disperse them. When the violence ended, I phoned in my story, taking care to stress my view that the police had provoked the incident. Later, I found out that another United Press International reporter had witnessed the demonstration from another vantage point and had told my editors that the students had forced the melee.

Rather than checking with me, the editors decided to blend my version with that of the other reporter at the scene. The result was a hodge-podge that only became more confused — and decidedly more in favor of the official police position — as successive rewrites of the story were undertaken by editors further and further removed from the action.

Some 20 years later, I attended a news

conference called by the Roman Catholic archbishop of Los Angeles at which he announced the opening of church-sponsored residential treatment centers for homeless AIDS victims.

About midway through the session, reporters more interested in talking about the church's opposition to homosexual activities challenged the archbishop to explain how he could justify helping gay men while the Vatican continued to condemn their sexual preferences.

Archbishop Roger Mahony tried to explain that church moral teaching, agreed with or not, did not preclude providing compassionate care to people who are dying. But the subtlety was lost on one agitated television reporter who kept insisting the prelate was being inconsistent.

When you're talking about racial, ethnic or religious conflicts you're talking about the stuff riots, wars and deep-seated prejudices are made of.

News gathering, to be sure, is a highly imperfect art, and problems with basic facts, not to mention nuances, are common. But when you are talking about conflicts that are at their root racial, ethnic or religious, the stakes are higher. This is the stuff riots, wars and deep-seated prejudices are made of, and the news media has an even greater responsibility than it normally does to get it right.

Cornering Competition

One observer of the journalistic scene, Irving Levine, national affairs director for the American Jewish Committee in New York, believes the coverage of racial, ethnic and religious conflict has slipped in the past two decades, a circumstance he attributes to "the culture of the newsroom and the competition it dictates."

In the turbulent 1960s, Levine said, news reporters came to realize "through a baptism of fire" that what they said and wrote could be manipulated by extremists, or even police and other government officials, to cause a serious distortion in public perceptions of sensitive issues. Out of that developed the principle that "you don't blow things up, you don't report in an inflammatory manner."

Today, however, Levine said, "There has been a memory loss." He noted that younger television reporters interviewed as part of a 1986 AJC study of how the New York news media handled a visit to that city by Black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan "argued the First Amendment and that whatever they could get they could use. The trend has been toward greater sensationalism born out of greater competition.

"In a pluralistic society you have to be careful with that stuff," he added.

Ben H. Bagdikian, dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California in Berkeley, is even more critical of the state of news reporting. He believes owners' insistence on the bottom line leaves the news media inadequately prepared for handling complicated religious, ethnic or racial stories simply because the only time such issues are dealt with is when they have become "sexy." Day-to-day coverage, which doesn't produce the same attention-grabbing headlines but provides on-going information that enables the broader picture to emerge, is ignored in favor of "violence and melodrama, the circus of the moment.

"The problem is the strategy of mainstream media to get the upscale viewers or readers. The result is only the affluent get covered regularly and the poor, which generally means minorities, disappear from the news except in dramatic moments," Bagdikian said. "But when the crisis comes, the news media has no basis on which to judge the context of the crisis.

"The media needs to take responsibility for the social effects of its profit policies."

Taking Stock

There are some bright spots, to be sure. Leading magazines, newspapers and television and radio news departments often produce articles, series or broadcasts that truly cut through the hype and get to the core of important issues dealing with race, religion and ethnicity. Levine thinks that television network reporting has improved in this regard despite the backsliding on the local scene, and that Sunday discussion shows often add the reasoned voice that is missing during the week.

Another note of optimism was offered by Dr. Maher Hathout, a leader of the Muslim community in Southern California. No longer, he said, are Arabs and Muslims always portrayed by American news media as either rich and corrupt oil sheiks or bloodthirsty religious fanatics. "There is more understanding in the media now. We have noticed that these subjects are better handled," he said, singling out the *Christian Science Monitor* for particularly well-informed reporting.

But the good news is too little and often too late, said Howard Rosenberg, Pulitzer Prize-winning TV columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, while disagreeing with Bagdikian that the problems primarily stem from the capitalistic intentions of media owners.

"Very little of what the news media does is conspiratorial. Most of the time we're just not good, and when that's the case at a point in our society when only members of an ethnic or religious group can criticize the group or you run the risk of being called a racist or bigot, it gets dangerous," Rosenberg said.

Of course, how well — or how poorly, if you prefer — journalists deal with sensitive issues of race, ethnicity and religion depends on one's perspective. But all agree that there is room for improvement.

How you improve the product is as delicate a question as any, however.

"Media administrators usually do not think ethnicity is newsworthy. They tend to think of it as merely a transitional form of identity that precedes 'Americanization.' "

Joe Giordano

Should standards be suggested, or even imposed, by individuals or groups outside the news media? Should the news media write its own guidelines for dealing with these kinds of stories that would dictate a different standard than prevails when reporting, for example, on City Hall or the weather?

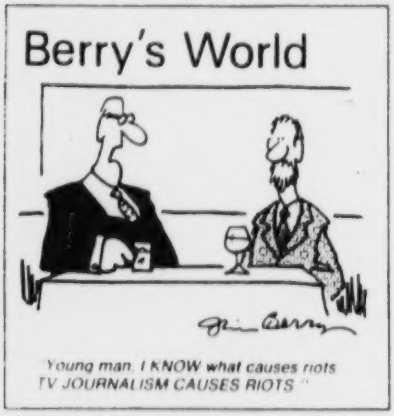
The answer to both questions, I think, is no.

Hard-and-fast rules of coverage just do not work in the largely seat-of-the-pants daily scramble to fill newspapers and television broadcasts with "news" that approximates some sense of reality. And censorship is antithetical to the democratic consciousness. Furthermore, even the mere suggestion by outsiders of reporting standards would be regarded by journalists as a threat to First Amendment

rights.

As for self-imposed rules for coverage, I think the majority of journalists would probably agree with Tom Capra, news director of KNBC-TV in Los Angeles and a 25-year veteran of the field, who said, "The same standard applies to all stories — just use your best judgment. I think we do sensitive stories very well."

What, then, is there left to do? The answer for ethnic groups is to maintain a dialogue with the news media in a constructive, non-confrontational way. Whether or not Bagdikian is correct about the grand schemes of news media owners (and my experience is that he may well be), most journalists simply want to tell a story as best they can. The key is to change their perception of what constitutes "best" so that it is understood to mean accurate, fair, in context and responsible.



"We can't just be reactive," said Father Joseph Battaglia, communications officer for the Los Angeles Catholic Archdiocese. "We need to be pro-active. We need to take the time and energy to work with reporters and editors to insure that they understand what we're talking about."

Levine also noted a responsibility of another sort. Participants in controversial, potentially inflammatory events need to restrain their own rhetoric and actions, he said.

"The big problem with media is they'll always go for a fast-talking spokesman, whether or not he or she really represents the group," said Levine. "But if all sides in a conflict play a cool-it role, it makes it easier for the media to do a responsible job."

Ira Rifkin is a Los Angeles free lance writer.

Re:Action

How to Detect Bias in the News

At one time or other we all complain about "bias in the news." The fact is, despite the journalistic ideal of "objectivity," every news story is influenced by the attitudes and background of its interviewers, writers, photographers and editors.

Not all bias is deliberate. But you can become a more aware news reader or viewer by watching for the following journalistic techniques that allow bias to "creep in" to the news:

1. Bias through selection and omission

An editor can express a bias by chosing to use or not to use a specific news item. Within a given story, some details can be ignored, others included to give readers or viewers a different opinion about the events reported. If, during a speech, a few people boo, the reaction can be described as "remarks greeted by jeers" or they can be ignored as "a handful of dissidents."

Bias through omission is difficult to detect. Only by comparing news reports from a wide variety of outlets can the form of bias be observed.

2. Bias through placement

Readers of papers judge first page stories to be more significant than those buried in the back. Television and radio newscasts run the most important stories first and leave the less significant for later. Where a story is placed, therefore, influences what a reader or viewer thinks about its importance.

3. Bias by headline

Many people read only the headlines of a news item. Most people scan nearly all the headlines in a newspaper. Headlines are the most-read part of a paper. They can summarize as well as present carefully hidden bias and prejudices. They can convey excitement where little exists. They can express approval or condemnation.

4. Bias by photos, captions and camera angles

Some pictures flatter a person, others make the person look unpleasant. A paper can choose photos to influence opinion about, for example, a candidate for election. On television, the choice of which visual images to display is extremely important. The captions newspapers run below photos are also potential sources of bias.

5. Bias through use of names and titles

News media often use labels and titles to describe people, places, and events. A person can be called an "ex-con" or be referred to as someone who "served time twenty years ago for a minor offense." Whether a person is described as a "terrorist" or a "freedom fighter" is a clear indication of editorial bias.

6. Bias through statistics and crowd counts

To make a disaster seem more spectacular (and therefore worthy of reading), numbers can be inflated. "A hundred injured in air crash" can be the same as "only minor injuries in air crash," reflecting the opinion of the person doing the counting.

7. Bias by source control

To detect bias, always consider where the news item "comes from." Is the information supplied by a reporter, an eyewitness, police or fire officials, executives, or elected or appointed government officials? Each may have a particular bias that is introduced into the story. Companies and public relations directors supply news outlets with puff pieces through news releases, photos or videos. Often news outlets depend on pseudo-events (demonstrations, sit-ins, ribbon cuttings, speeches and ceremonies) that take place mainly to gain news coverage.

8. Word choice and tone

Showing the same kind of bias that appears in headlines, the use of positive or negative words or words with a particular connotation can strongly influence the reader or viewer.

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Producer's Lament:
BOTTOM LINE STILL TOPS

By Gene Reynolds

In a perfect TV world, the tube would reflect the great diversity and variety of our society. Obviously, it does not. The reasons for this failure lie in our constant struggle to find a balance between commercial and creative demands.

Although programming balance is the goal, it doesn't seem likely we'll ever achieve it. The ratings system (which sends just about any third-place show in a time slot to the showers), the market for dumb or mediocre shows and the values of broadcasters and sponsors are some of the reasons. Fear of change, a reluctance to take risks and an overvaluing of assimilation, are others.

For example, although it might be changing, one of the reasons you haven't seen shows with Latino families in the lead, or even in soft focus, is the networks' low estimate of the American public. They've decided that viewers aren't interested, and they will tell you they've arrived at this conclusion from testing or from trial. But the only real test of popularity for this kind of show is quality entertainment.

We know that for years the networks avoided black shows and failed to place black actors in lead or important supporting roles. They started with the same assumptions: People weren't interested (if not actually hostile); they would lose Southern stations. With the advent of *The Cosby Show* and other hits, we can see that their fears were a projection of their own prejudices. Obviously, black stars and black shows (granted, not all of them examples of authenticity) have had great acceptance and have enriched the television medium.

Without them, we'd be the poorer, just as we lose the minority and ethnic storylines we're still not seeing.

But fearsome assumptions are still going on. Broadcasting time is definitely money, and the totally commercial character of the ratings system means that the network that wins a time slot is rewarded with many millions of dollars. Under this system, audience size — not a pluralistic society or ethnic identity — is the major

programming consideration.

There are reasons for some of programmers' fears. Our industry needs to remain self-policing. We don't need another wave of the family hour with all its contradictions and superficial criteria. Neither would I like to see the serious consideration of restrictive suggestions, even from well-meaning groups.

Identity Conflict

Nevertheless, the nature of American society presents a more subtle barrier to the expression of cultural diversity on television.

Despite talk of pluralism, the United States, at least, still values the melting pot — and we're perhaps the only great immigrant nation with this characteristic. Canada, another nation of immigrants, is much more willing to nurture diversity. Toronto's Italians, Greeks, Portuguese, Chinese, East Asians, West Indians and Ukrainians celebrate their holidays and festivals, and their languages, traditions and customs seem to be much more intact and respected than in the United States. American immigrants drop anything that identifies them with the Old World and melt into the crowd.

As an American Jew, in some ways I can't complain about the way we've fared. We've enjoyed religious freedom and have been able to express ourselves. But many elements of our origins — like those of others — have become obscure. Where is the language and wisdom of the grandmothers and the beauty of our past? In a perfect world we would be deeply involved and devoted to our adopted country and still maintain an understanding and reverence for our cultures of origin.

This is the dilemma, and once the media takes the challenge seriously I think much can be done to deal with it. The heroes of the battle will be the artists. It is up to them to contribute to the climate of appreciation by their selection and treatment of story and character. The bottom-liners will fear losing the bigots and overestimate their opposition. It is up to the writers, the directors and the actors who cherish human values to weave the colorful concepts of ethnic diversity into their work. Our artists will bring our grandparents out of the closet.

Gene Reynolds is a television producer and director. His credits include Lou Grant, M*A*S*H *and* Room 222.

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I'LL BE HOME FOR HANUKKAH

After years of having no heritage, TV characters are beginning to bring their backgrounds on screen.

By Rosalind Silver

Scene 1:
Hanukkah candles glimmer in the December darkness of a comfortable living room. As mother and baby gaze at them, a thirty-ish, darkhaired man walks into the room. As he enters and sees the menorah, his eyes meet his wife's in a look of love and understanding. As the scene ends, a friend leaves a Christmas tree on the doorstep.

Scene 2:
It is just after nightfall at the bar of a crowded but cozy restaurant. As a tall, dapper black man in a stylish suit finishes a story, a blond white man leans forward. He exchanges looks with a collegiate-looking black man standing next to the bar. "Isn't that just like him?" their glances say.

The scenes described above are snapshots from the popular ABC drama *thirtysomething* and CBS's critically praised, but still-too-little-watched half-hour "dramedy," *Frank's Place*. Although their storylines and ambience are very different, both well-reviewed shows represent a positive trend in network television— an ethnic mix, non-stereotyped characters and a real sense that the characters know and understand each other.

On *thirtysomething*, that understanding is the stuff of real life. The show's creators freely admit that the characters and lives of the young marrieds and singles they feature are based on their own lives and those of people they know.

"Michael does represent our own feelings about our religious beliefs and our ethnic background," according to Richard Kramer, producer and author of the Christmas/Hanukkah episode. "But beyond that, it's helped us in creating someone who's very real. We know his grandparents, his aunts and cousins; we had seen his Bar Mitzvah. We wanted to create a character who was full."

"thirtysomething"

Most important, Kramer says, was the desire to avoid doing "the standard television character who is nothing — who is only handsome"— and has no ethnic background.

Although other current TV series have also dealt with Jewish themes and charac-

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ters — *A Year in the Life* has its own episode on intermarriage, *LA Law* has dealt with anti-Semitism, and *thirtysomething* has delved into religious and cultural practices including a dream in which Michael's Yiddish-speaking grandfather appeared. The Hanukkah theme received the most response; as Kramer puts it, "We were overwhelmed with cards and letters."

In addition to future episodes on related themes, Kramer also expects to explore the backgrounds of other characters.

Although *Frank's Place* is notable for the easy relations between its black and white characters—Bubba, a Jewish lawyer and a habitue of the restaurant, is Frank's best friend— its writers like to think they're not just avoiding stereotyping but "expressing truth with a small 't' — a literary truth."

"Shows about blacks usually act as if 'blackness' were a separate country," notes writer Samm-Art Williams, who is black. "Being black is a subculture, not something separate; it's part of the general mixture."

Even a show about Frank's refusal to be the token dark-skinned member in a club for light-skinned blacks "wasn't so much a show about the issue but about anyone who had that kind of decision to make," commented producer/writer Max Tash during a group interview with several writers and producers. "When I watch the show, I don't ask myself whether it expresses black culture, even though many people think it does. I ask myself whether this point got across or whether the joke was funny."

Avoiding Cliches

In general, *Frank's Place* writers try to develop their characters and use fewer set formulas for working with them. It helps that "the network leaves us alone," which they attribute to the strong personality of executive producer Hugh Wilson. Wilson's own Southern background helps boost the show's oft-noted sense of place, and he provides many ideas. As one of the writers put it, "Writing for the show often involves opening up Hugh's head and looking inside."

Strong writing is the key to balanced ethnic portraits, according to Mark Malis, vice president/casting for Universal and co-chair of the minority and disabled casting committee of the Casting Society of America.

"We've developed guidelines to help casting directors encourage more minority and disabled casting so these groups can be portrayed more positively, and I've been very involved in this work. But of course, we get the scripts after they're written; we can't affect what they say."

"Frank's Place"

Malis finds it hard to see how a greater consciousness of white ethnicity in the casting process could help portrayals of white ethnic groups. "What's 'looking Jewish', for example?" he asks. "Italian or Polish or Irish names appear in the scripts, but they're played by the same actors that play other roles. An actor's physicality does affect casting somewhat—I probably wouldn't cast a dark, Mediterranean-looking actor as a German— but beyond that I'd pick the best actor. If there's another consciousness for this, I don't think it's developed yet."

The need for greater ethnic identity is seen by Joseph Giordano, director of the American Jewish Committee's Center on Ethnicity, Behavior and Communications, who notes,"Jews and blacks are making progress, but where are the stimulating shows about Hispanics, Greeks, Russians? The rest of us have got to do what it takes to get it together."

Another Look

If consciousness for Jews, at least, is changing, Susan Baerwald at NBC is part of the new awareness. As vice president for development of mini-series and novels for television, she has overseen a number of Jewish-themed projects, as well as many more general big-budget mini-series and dramatizations.

"I don't look for 'Jewish' projects necessarily," she says, "but when we're doing them I relate to them, because that's who I am. She notes that the recent well-received recounting of the Leo Frank case and its tale of anti-Semitism in pre-World War I Georgia, *The Ballad of Mary Phagan*, involved close consultation with the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League. "They formed initially to deal with that case, so it was particularly appropriate," she says. "But there are solid promotional and financial reasons for involving groups in the production process and working with them on promotion for their audiences. On that project, as on others, we were reaching for the kind of viewers who watch PBS — or read books." Presentation of the characters' religious background was a concern during the filming of *Phagan*, Baerwald adds. Sabbath candles appeared in one scene set at the Franks' dinner table before his arrest, but were not emphasized. "I think it came off all right."

The dramatization of *O, Jerusalem*, the Collins/LaPierre bestselling book on the Israeli War of Independence, is being developed as an NBC mini-series, and Baerwald expects it to challenge the network's capacity for balance and require the involvement of consultants, as writers work to assimilate competing views of that struggle and update the book in terms of today's political events.

In general, the network's Broadcast Standards and Practices Department has set up guidelines to avoid stereotyping and negative portraits of minorities, Baerwald said. "They can tell us to avoid casting minorities as criminals, and make sure that every doctor isn't a white male." But, she says, positive portrayal and cast-

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ing that stretches or explodes stereotypes, "like casting a gorgeous hunk of an Hispanic" as a major character on *LA Law* — "that depends on someone like Stephen Bochco."

Telling Details

Ethnic themes do require knowledge, however. "I knew I was in trouble on the set of *Evergreen* (a saga about a Jewish immigrant women) when a dinner table crowd all raised their glasses and said 'Shalom' instead of 'L'Chaim.' The writers didn't know the difference, but we were able to set them straight."

Such niceties are a very recent concern, according to Lionel Chetwyn, producer/writer/director whose credits include *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, as well as *Winter in Clear River*, a recent TV drama about one woman's fight against Nazis in a small American town.

Although Hollywood has long been heavily Jewish, it's a new thing for Jewish producers, writers and executives to be comfortable with letting their roots show, Chetwyn says. "At the same time, the treatment of minorities moved from Stepin Fetchit to the Huxtables without presenting much of the anguish of the journey."

"I think what we're seeing now is a realization that the people who watch television are much more interested in the things that make us different than the people who run things have been." With all their differences, these shows, and others like them, do demonstrate the many factors that must coalesce into solid, non-stereotyped ethnic portrayals on television. A creative vision, strong leadership and a supportive, yet hands-off attitude from the network help to make it happen. Excitement about the characters keeps them real, week after week.

But even more important, there has to be a sense that what is being said about them is acceptable, and that changes. The family life of black professionals, the exploration of Judaism, interracial friendships have become acceptable or they wouldn't be appearing on television. And the fact that they are on television will help to make them more so. One thing, however, hasn't changed. *Thirtysomething*, watched by some 25 million people weekly, has found its audience and has a safe harbor for its ethnicity, psychologically-oriented portraits and innovation. The continued existence of the high quality of *Frank's Place* depends on better ratings than the show has garnered so far. Although next season's episodes have been ordered, no one among the cast and crew members celebrating the seasonal wrap could help wondering: "Will we still be here next year?"

"Cagney and Lacey"

Like the famous tree in the forest, "an ethnic mix, non-stereotyped characters and a real sense that the characters know and understand each other" don't really happen — unless enough someones are watching.

Rosalind Silver is associate editor of Media&Values.

HOLLYWOOD'S ARAB:
Still Stuck in the Desert

For years moviegoers have been offered stereotypical images of the Arab. The stereotype provides myths and misperceptions which tend to influence public opinion and limit the formulation of a successful policy in the Middle East.

The Arab male is portrayed as a contemptible character — cowardly, primitive, ignorant, cruel, vicious, lecherous and, often, fabulously wealthy. An Arab woman is either a sensuous belly dancer, whore, terrorist or a veiled, silent appendage to her husband.

Filmmakers too often dip into their script bags for the "Instant Arab Kit." For women, it contains belly dancers' outfits and veils; for men, it consists of *kuffiyahs*, flowing robes, sunglasses, scimitars, limousines and camels. Oil wells, sand dunes and *souks* set the scene.

In many films released in the mid-1980s, the Hollywood Arab prowls the screen amidst a mishmash of misinformation. Viewers see a disturbing recurrence of similarly negative characters, with inaccurate or stereotypical settings. The interchangeable sets of "Arabland" invariably show Israeli and American actors as veiled women in black, shabbily dressed men, ferocious terrorists, belly dancers, armed guards and evil dictators. The desert set offers a similar cast of characters, including sheep, horses and camels. Into the perennial desert the producers drop a military air base or a cheap mockup of an Arabian Nights' palace. Urban settings offer *sheikhs* in sunglasses doing dastardly deeds in black limousines or glittering Mercedes. Producers fail to show today's Arabian cities. Their message is: You can take the Hollywood Arab out of the desert, but you can't take the desert out of the Hollywood Arab.

Stereotypes form "pictures in our heads," and pictures relay powerful messages. Concerned moviemakers could channel such messages in a constructive or entertaining manner. But films cannot be entertaining or their messages constructive when a people is dehumanized. It is time for filmmakers to revise their perception of "Arabland" and begin to portray a new Hollywood Arab.

This article by Jack G. Shaheen is excerpted from The Mideast Monitor.

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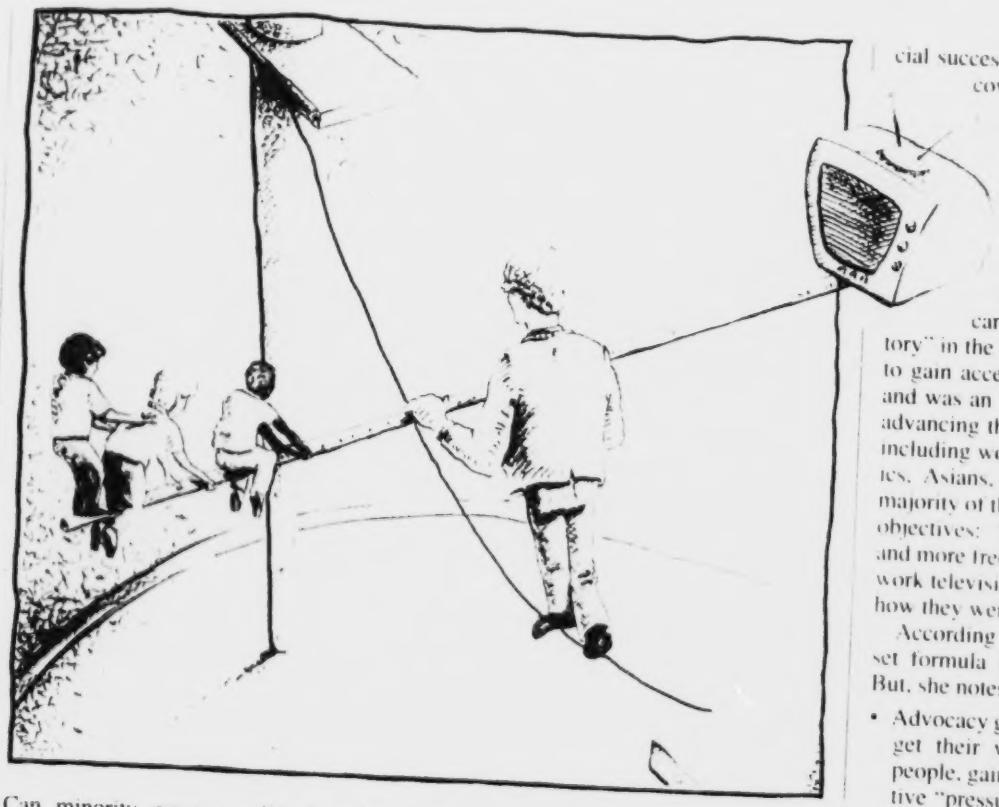
MAKING WAVES

Persistence is essential, but pressure groups find it only sometimes pays off.

By Brian Levine



Can minority groups, political action organizations and others influence television programming? Yes and no, says Kathryn Montgomery, assistant professor of film and television studies at the University of California/Los Angeles and author of *Target: Prime Time*, an upcoming book on advocacy groups and entertainment.

According to extensive research by Montgomery, the power of influence of advocacy groups depends not so much on the willingness of the entertainment industry to listen to various points of view, but each group's persistence and effectiveness in influencing the creative community. Montgomery traces a long-term advocacy effort by the gay rights movement that began with the 1972 television movie *That Certain Summer*, which recounted a teenage boy's reaction to the discovery that his divorced father was a homosexual.

As the first major treatment of gay relationships on television, *That Certain Summer* was both a critical and commercial success, generating enormous press coverage and excellent ratings. It also helped stimulate a major lobbying effort by the gay community and was an example of how television programming could both influence society and be influenced by it.

Prime-time television became "critical symbolic territory" in the struggle of advocacy groups to gain acceptance in the wider society and was an "essential political tool" for advancing the cause of a host of groups including women, blacks, Jews, Hispanics, Asians, Italians, and others. The majority of these groups shared the same objectives: They wanted to have better, and more frequent representation on network television, and to have some say in how they were portrayed.

According to Montgomery, there is no set formula for achieving these goals. But, she notes the following points:

- Advocacy groups have to find a way to get their views across to the right people, gain a knowledge of the effective "pressure points" in the industry, and establish some form of leverage.
- Effective advocacy groups must understand the needs of their own organizations and what they want from entertainment programming. They have to establish goals for changes in programming, yet take into account the limitations of television.
- They must take great strides to learn what makes programming effective and how their views can be presented to a mass audience.

"Successful groups," she says, "adopt a

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strategy that puts them into a cooperative position with industry representatives." They break through the informal social structures that govern the entertainment industry through ongoing "networking" with producers and other executives sympathetic to their issues.

The original efforts of ethnic and minority groups such as the NAACP, CORE, and Justicia, a Latino advocacy group, were bolstered by the effects of the civil rights movement and the direct pressure that was placed upon the entertainment-industrial complex. Today, television producers seem to be becoming comfortable with the portrayal of ethnic and racial characters, but the battle over content and portrayal is a continuing process.

Montgomery notes that currently, there are not many organized groups dealing with ethnic issues in the media. Unlike the early '70s when political activism was high, the attitude of the '80s is one of political disinterest.

But at the same time she notes that the networks, particularly, now know how to *manage* advocacy groups. To their credit, networks have become sensitive to the more blatant stereotypes. Consultation is routine — at least with the more moderate advocates of an issue or group — from the beginning of a production. "Above all, the networks try to avoid social problems," she explains.

Whether network executives or a producer will take a risk and create a show on a nontraditional portrayal (of an ethnic group, for instance) or a controversial topic depends, says Montgomery, on whether the executive believes the majority of the general public is ready to accept the idea.

"The number one concern of television executives is getting people to watch their shows. Any group that can work *with* the industry to increase the audience has the best chance of success not only in being heard but in successfully getting its point of view on the air."

Brian Levine is an editorial research intern for Media & Values *and a master's candidate at the Annenberg School of Communications at the University of Southern California.*

A CENTURY OF ABUSE

By Allen L. Woll

When one considers the history of the depiction of ethnic and racial groups within motion pictures, one sees almost a century of abuse in this regard. From the dawn of films virtually all ethnic groups have been stereotyped on the screen. Yet it is impossible to blame motion pictures alone for the perpetuation of these derogatory images. Most existed previously in literature and the graphic arts. Nevertheless, as the first mass media in the United States, movies spread distorted and often negative images of blacks, Mexican-Americans, Irish, Chinese, Italians and others throughout the world.

Examples abound from the earliest days of the silent cinema. D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* is perhaps the most notorious example. The famed director's portrayal of violent, lazy and ignorant blacks in the Civil War south has resulted in decades of protest whenever the film has been shown.

But Griffith's work was only one of many to display black characters in the worst possible light.

Hispanics, known as "greasers" in such silent films as *Tony the Greaser* (1911), experienced similar treatment in early silents.

The image of America's ethnic and racial groups has not been uniformly negative, to be sure. There have been periods in which movies have taken long strides in the elimination of derogatory ethnic portrayals. During World War II, major advances were seen in the depiction of Hispanics and blacks, as a response to a deliberate wartime effort to demonstrate our democracy in action on the screen. In such motion pictures as *That Night in Rio*, *Down Argentine Way*, and *Weekend in Havana*, Latin Americans became sophisticated and educated individuals. Several musicals with blacks casts, such as *Stormy Weather* and *Cabin in the Sky*, appeared in an attempt to display the prominent role of black citizens in American society. Interestingly, both of these reversals were motivated by a major government effort to eliminate many of the derogatory stereotypes that had been so prevalent on the screen in earlier periods.

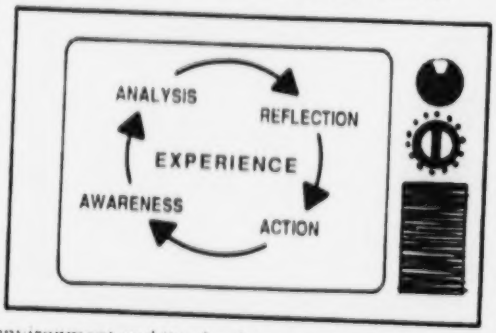
Progress, where it exists, is rarely continuous. If there's a lesson in this continuing pattern, it may be that film stereotypes are a convenient shorthand for ideas moviemakers expect viewers to hold. Perhaps only if we change our ideas and broaden our concepts can we prevent the repetition of this century of stereotype.

Historian Allen L. Woll is co-author, with Randall M. Miller, of Ethnic and Racial Images in American Film and Television.

REFLECTION/ACTION

Tools to build media awareness for groups, classes, families

How to Build Media Awareness



Media&Values is more than a magazine. It's a tool, a catalyst, for leading you — or helping you to lead others — from awareness to action on the many issues raised by today's mass media and new technology.

Whether you're a teacher, counselor, youth worker, religious leader, or just an active media watcher of any age, the ideas and activities on the following pages can help you examine your media environment and "make the connections" between what we hear, read and watch and our everyday lives.

Many people ask if anything can really be done about issues like sexual violence in the media, bias in the news or advertising to children. Yes, of course! But because the mass media system is only one aspect of our very complex social structure — with economic, political and cultural ramifications — change comes slowly.

Thus there are no easy answers, or quick-fix solutions. Perhaps, indeed, what is most important is learning to question, to be suspicious, to challenge what we see and hear and to test it against our experience.

That's where *Media&Values* can help.

Using a framework created by Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, each issue of *Media&Values* takes the reader — individually or as part of a group — through a four-step process of media awareness/analysis/reflection/action. Note how the magazine is put together:

- The first article raises our awareness of the theme topic and what some of the major questions are.
- Further articles develop political, economic, social, cultural or historical background to help you analyze the topic. A list of resources provides direction for deeper exploration.
- Next, *Media&Values* columnists provide thoughtful reflection and suggestions for positive action for different groups and audiences in society. Additional *Re:Action* boxes provide practical program tips for classroom or group discussions.
- Finally, the last page focuses on one group that has "gotten involved" in the issue and whose actions can provide a model for others.

Whether a group is two people over breakfast, a dozen children in kindergarten, a college seminar class, or eight individuals in a church study group, we all have media experiences to share! Stimulated by the articles and ideas in *Media&Values* we can reflect on these experiences and gain deeper insight into how we use the media, how the media uses us and what steps we can take, individually or as a society, to keep our media values in a healthy perspective.

WOMEN

Dose of Reality Spices TV Lives

By Sally Steenland

Just as an experiment, think of five fictional TV women you know pretty well. Now try to answer the following questions for each character. What is her religion? What is her ethnic background? What part of the United States did she grow up in? Where does she live now? These are not terribly difficult questions. In fact, you could probably answer them quite easily for most of your co-workers and neighbors.

But what are the answers for Maggie Seaver on *Growing Pains*? For Elyse Keaton of *Family Ties*? For Grace Van Owen on *L.A. Law*?

Despite the familiarity of such TV personae, their ethnic and religious heritage is usually not apparent, even after seasons on the air. Instead, they blend into some sort of homogeneous whole where everyone seems vaguely related to everyone else.

This melting pot gone awry is TV's rule rather than its exception. Situation comedies especially have given us decades of ethnically interchangeable families in make-believe towns: *The Donna Reed Show*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It To Beaver*. Typical Americans all, not one had identifiable ethnic roots or a specific religious heritage. Nor were these families particularly defined by geography, since their towns were Anyplace, USA.

These days TV is doing a better job of giving characters geographic roots and a sense of place. From *Murder, She Wrote* in Cabot's Cove, Maine, to *Designing*

"On television, religion is a more sensitive subject than narcotics."

Gene Reynolds,
television producer

Re:Action

Listening to Many Voices

One way for a class or discussion group to experience various ethnic groups is to examine ethnic publications. Order single copies from the following list of representative racial, ethnic and religious organizations. Students and group members may be able to suggest others or bring them in from home.

Begin your discussion with these questions: What subjects are important to each group? How are news and personalities treated? Pay special attention to illustrations and photographs. What products are advertised in each publication?

Akwesasne Notes (Native Peoples)
P.O. Box 196, Rooseveltown, NY 13673
(613)932-9452; $15/yr.; $2/copy

Ebony (black)
820 S. Michigan, Chicago, IL 60605
(312)322-9200; $6/yr.; $2/copy

Essence (black women)
1500 Broadway, New York, NY
(212)730-4260; $10/yr; $1.50/copy.

Forum: A Ukrainian Review
The Ukrainian Fraternal Association
1140 Wyoming Ave., Scranton, PA 18509-0350
(717)342-0937; $8/yr.; $2/copy

Hispanic
111 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Ste. 200
Washington, DC 20001
(202)682-9023; $18/yr; $2/copy.

Hispanic Business
360 S. Hope Ave., Ste. 300-C
Santa Barbara, CA 93105, (805)682-5843
$18/yr.; complimentary single copy

Irish America
432 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016
(212)725-2993; $20/yr.; $2.50/copy plus postage

Minaret (Islamic)
434 S. Vermont Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90020
(213)384-5783; $3/copy.

Moment (Jewish)
3000 Connecticut Ave. NW, Ste. 300
Washington, DC 20008
(202)387-8888; $18/yr; $4/copy.

Rice (Asian American)
251 Post St., 6th Floor, San Francisco, CA 94108
(415)398-2332; $22/yr; $2.25/copy.

Women in Atlanta, programs are set in cities other than L.A., and viewers can actually catch glimpses of Boston, Seattle, Miami, and Dallas.

TV is also doing a better job creating characters who, like most Americans, are identifiably ethnic. On both *A Year in the Life* and *thirtysomething* this season, Jewish/Christian couples have struggled with differing religious traditions and beliefs — how to celebrate the holidays, how to raise the baby, how to create new family traditions. These traditional "women's issues" are front and center.

And on *Cagney and Lacey*, Chris Cagney is a finely-drawn Irish Catholic whose upbringing strongly motivates her current behavior. Such characters are more authentic than generic Americans because their specific, layered backgrounds are more like real life.

The danger, of course, is that writers will unsuccessfully attempt to create characters unlike themselves and so will resort to popular ethnic and religious stereotypes. Such has been the fate of many black characters on TV. A notable exception this season is *Frank's Place*, unusual for its extreme specificity of location and culture. Set in a New Orleans Creole restaurant, the show manages to paint a colorful, authentic picture of social class, religion and race. Interestingly, its female lead is a woman in a non-traditional occupation — a mortician. Perhaps partly because the character is based on a real woman, her job is usually treated with respect.

The characters in these shows succeed precisely because they make it clear that ethnicity is only one aspect of their many-sided identities. If we're lucky, perhaps they'll be the first of many TV friends who will bring their backgrounds, as well as their lives, with them when they enter our living rooms.

Sally Steenland is the media director of the National Commission on Working Women of Wider Opportunities for Women.

PASTORING

Stereotypes Back? It's No Joke

By Rev. Peter Paulsen

"Have you heard the one about ...?" Successful jokes depend on the irony and inconsistency that underlie humor. Recently, far too many of those introductions seem to lead directly to a punchline based on racial or sexual stereotyping.

Some observers contend that 20 years of unresolved ethnic tensions are bubbling through the veneer we laid over them to create an environment in which it is permissible to talk of others in deprecatory ways. I wonder if TV shows like *The Jeffersons* and *Chico and the Man* and movies like *Beverly Hills Cop I & II* haven't both given permission and content for these destructive attitudes.

More germane to the issue may be the news coverage of recent headline stories. When the network's choice from volumes of file tape is a picture of Panama's Gen. Noriega, standing at military review in a designer fatigue outfit, we tend to see the

"The emotions of prejudice are formed early in childhood, while the beliefs that are used to justify it come later. You may want to change your prejudice, but it is far easier to change your intellectual beliefs than your deep feelings."

Thomas Pettigrew, professor, University of California, Santa Cruz

bandito caricature and believe its truth. When news documentaries show us the success of hard-working Vietnamese fishers in the Gulf of Mexico and give voice to those who hate and torment them, we remember our own economic insecurities and side with the threatened Anglos. When radio news carries the voices of Howard Beach, Queens, New York, residents denouncing the victims of that community's racial violence with the most base slurs, we learn that it's again all right to be angry and use that language.

Lest we in the religious community become too smug, our own media have done little to communicate the diversity of creation, the positive attributes of other groups of people and the sin of bigotry and racial hatred. Many of our young people, using our religious education curricula, picture the people in the Bible stories as Northern Europeans. The literature we have given them fails to teach them that the people of the Middle East are dark-skinned and speak a language other than English.

As evidence of bias accumulates, the religious leader is called to live a life that embraces the pluralism of our land and world. Illustrations in writing and speaking should be drawn from diverse peoples; religious education media should be chosen for their faithfulness to the pluralism of creation and the introduction to destructive humor should be followed with a joke-stopping NO!

In a way unique in this generation, the pastor, priest or rabbi is called to make words and deeds reflective of the fact that all people are loved and created equal. The destructive excesses of this permissive age must find their match in leaders who take personally the responsibility of modeling tolerance and are willing to call others — and the media — to task when they do not.

A former media consultant, Peter Paulsen is a pastor and program director in the Reformed Church in America.

CHILDREN

Varied Images Teach Lesson In Pluralism

By Judith Myers-Walls

Awareness of racial and ethnic differences develops gradually during childhood. Color and other physical differences are likely to be noticed first, and subtle ethnic differences will come last. Because this awareness is just developing during young childhood, it represents an excellent opportunity to build positive attitudes and appreciation of diversity.

Media provide an opportunity for children to be exposed to a variety of people, although in a very superficial way. This exposure may be very important to children who live in a homogeneous environment. Children will not automatically develop positive attitudes from TV images or other media exposure, however. They need guidance to reach the point of understanding and appreciating diversity. Teaching children to survey the media can help them gain the most benefit from the potential provided by television, videotapes or movies, and magazines.

A preschooler can learn to survey the media by answering questions like, "How are the people in this program (or article or advertisement) different from each other? How are they the same?" Children can look for color differences, speech patterns and variations in dress at the same time that they look for emotions, needs and situations that are common across those differences.

Elementary-age children are capable of more detailed analysis of the presentation of diversity. They can use paper and pencil to begin to keep track of the frequency with which races and ethnic groups appear. They can explore which groups are most often the "good guys" and which are the "bad guys." Who most often needs help, and who most often provides that help? How do the media presentations compare to the children's real-life experiences? What suggestions would they make for helping the groups they see presented get along better? What could they themselves do to get along better with the people in their world?

A varied and empathetic media mix is no substitute for positive home attitudes about racial or ethnic groups. But parents who are already concerned about the way their children think and feel about others can use media as an important tool in teaching their children about the world they see around them. And of course, the more the media provides realistic, human stories about a wide variety of groups, the easier the lesson will be.

Judith A. Myers-Walls is associate professor of child development at Purdue University in Lafayette, Indiana.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Daily Habits Stymie Diversity

By Donna Demac

Last fall I attended a forum in New York City on the challenges faced by "minorities" in the print and broadcast media. The four main speakers, who were Asian, Latino, Italian American, and black, held jobs at different ranks, ranging from cub reporter to chief of the sales division at a local Spanish-language radio station. As I listened to them, I was struck by the repeated mention of feelings of separateness — of being a conspicuous Other.

A woman with a soft-spoken Chinese accent said her comments at departmental meetings often were not heard, until they were said in louder accents by someone else. A video editor said his colleagues

"I ask my nephew, 'You want to be Superman?' He says, 'I could never be Superman... he's white.'"

Robert Townsend,
writer/director, *Hollywood Shuffle*

treated him as an outsider even though he'd been on the job three years.

Twenty years ago it became apparent that changes in station employment were necessary for greater program diversity. Groups lobbied the FCC to adopt new regulatory policies. Today, employment regulations exist for both broadcasting and cable TV. However, changes in employment — still far from sufficient — have not significantly punctuated the monotony of supposedly "normal" (non-ethnic) characters and stories in the electronic media.

It is now clear that the main obstacles to diversity lie at a deeper level, beyond the reach of regulation. At the core of the problem is the strong affinity that those in charge have for their own way of doing things. Daily habits born of culture, race, gender and class do much to explain why media executives are slow to place other groups' values and concerns on a par with their own.

Unless overcome by competing pressures, these instincts also ensure that programs and even news stories reflect only a narrow portion of our multicultural population. While those who write and produce the media may argue that this is what the public wants, it's probably truer to say that they themselves have a hard time getting excited about something truly different.

This is not to deny the existence of public and individual prejudices. Indeed, it seems to me that the media reflect an America that, despite its pluralistic intentions, is often unabashedly intolerant on the subject of racial, sexual and cultural diversity. Incidents such as the murder at Howard Beach show the dire need for a coming together, for common aims and values, yet also point to the deep-seated antagonisms that prolong societal divisions.

Diversifying media is one important means of countering prejudice. The speakers at the forum I attended mentioned ways of introducing new messages, including the involvement of ethnic commercial sponsors, and regular contact with local station managers on the issue of media images. More generally, it is essential that we make ourselves and others more aware of the habits and organizational practices that are the daily nemesis of media diversity.

Attorney Donna Demac teaches communications and law at New York University.

MINORITIES

Media Play Role Bridging Cultures

By Carlos Cortés

The media have influenced ethnic diversity in many ways — some obvious, some unpredictable, some paradoxical. As minorities move surely, if too slowly, into positions of media influence, the complexity of this impact has increased.

Minority newspapers and periodicals have played a dual role, helping to strengthen both minority cultures and minority acculturation. On the one hand, they provide foreign news, ethnic community information and an outlet for ethnic expression. The result is strengthened ethnic identity and cultural (including language) maintenance.

But ethnic identity and cultural maintenance should not be equated with societal divisiveness. Ethnic identities do not conflict with a deep sense of Americanism. Millions of Americans speak more than one language and move comfortably among cultures.

The minority press has facilitated this intercultural flexibility. It has built bridges between minority communities and mainstream U.S. culture, examining American life, educating readers about opportunities, and furnishing information on services. Particularly for newly arrived Asian and Latin American immigrants, the ethnic-language press may be their primary source of societal knowledge and the main avenue to acculturation to the United States.

Like ethnic periodicals, motion pictures and television have addressed ethnic diversity. Recent years have brought the emergence of a phalanx of talented young minority filmmakers, who have influenced the visual images of their groups. Sometimes their efforts have provided dramatic responses among minority viewers.

School Daze, the recent comedy by the irreverent young black filmmaker Spike Lee, has divided black viewers. Some have condemned his portrayal of intra-black social divisions, with skin color and hair styles separating blacks along caste lines. Other blacks have applauded his audacity in addressing this taboo subject.

Or take the case of an adult education teacher with whom I have worked. She recently took her class of Latin American immigrants to see the English-language version of Louis Valdez' hit movie, *La Bamba*. Obviously this rags-to-riches story of Chicano rock-and-roller Richie Valens (born Ricardo Valenzuela) must be the ideal minority role model movie, right? Ads even proclaimed it "An American Success Story."

Yet when the teacher asked these immigrants what they had learned from the movie, their almost unanimous answer came as a shock — that to be accepted and to succeed in America, you need to change your name!

In print and in the visual media, minority people are expressing their ideas, their dreams and their visions. But, as with all media, the impact has been varied and often surprising.

Carlos Cortés is professor of history at the University of California/Riverside. He is currently writing a book on ethnic images in the American feature film.

"Even if you present people with evidence that disconfirms their stereotypes, they will find ways to deny the evidence."

Walter Stephan,
psychologist

GLOBAL SCENE

World Market Is New Reality

By Keval Joseph Kumar

Satellite and cable communications are in the process of internationalizing the mass media. Dish antennaes and cable links are already bringing American news and sitcoms directly into homes in Europe, and the video revolution in Asia and Africa has made the latest Hollywood films more easily available than local productions. National governments with carefully nurtured public broadcasting systems compete with media originating across the border.

Thus the struggle of developing countries to counter cultural imperialism through a free and balanced flow of information between the affluent and the poor countries has been all but lost, despite a few brave efforts. Transnational commercial interests have taken over satellite channels, and it is only a matter of time before the global marketplace (very different from McLuhan's vision of a global village) becomes a reality.

The marketplace orientation of international media programs may make the minorities of industrialized countries even less visible than they are now. Mainstream cultures are not likely to promote pluralism in the images they beam round the world. Indeed, stereotypes that present minorities as a problem to national cultures will be further reinforced.

We need not, however, overreact to these portraits. Fortunately, the children and young people who are most susceptible to media are also influenced by many other contacts and activities. But they need to be educated in the pitfalls and bigotry inherent in media stereotypes as well. Young people must develop this critical awareness to become discriminating viewers.

Only then can they bring pressure to bear on the national and transnational merchants of the media, voting with their dials, and maybe consumer movements and boycotts, for media that reflect their ethnic makeup and culture.

Keval Joseph Kumar is a staff member of the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture in London.

FAMILY LIFE

'Tossed Salad' Culture Honors Diversity

By Helen H. Graham Burns

During the 1960s, I moved from Georgia to Maryland and then to Connecticut. All of a sudden I was a Southern, white, Protestant female living first in a Baltimore ghetto and then in an Irish/Italian, Catholic, blue-collar neighborhood. I had become a minority, and while I learned that many of my fears were unfounded, I felt isolated and invisible.

This experience taught me that fears grow from focusing on differences rather than similarities. Though the melting pot image suggests inclusivity, it can homogenize away individuality. I prefer to think of the U.S. as a tossed salad, with room for diverse and distinct parts in a common whole.

How well do our media reflect the tossed salad, instead of insisting on the myth of the melting pot? Certainly they've made progress. But the mere presence of different ethnic groups on television does not guarantee that dignity or importance will be part of the message. Nor does it insure that we see the diversity and varied character of any ethnic group.

As the mother of a large family, I find this troubling. Research shows that television and film images of ethnic persons are accepted as representative of their particular groups. Furthermore, many viewers have no experience, positive or negative, with anyone different from themselves. Thus, they are very open to media reinforcement of their previous stereotypes.

What can we do about this? We can watch programs that treat their characters as human beings and tune out those that don't. We can also write complimentary or critical letters to networks and sponsors.

But as members of families, we can begin by raising our ethnic consciousness, starting with our backgrounds. Consider learning about your own ethnic heritage and telling its stories to your family. Even those with ties to no particular ethnic group come from a family, a region, a religion whose ways can be learned and cherished.

In addition to library and video store research, grandparents or other elderly relatives may be a resource for families seeking to preserve their heritages.

Consider video or audiotaping their memories or storytelling. If they are known for a special craft or skill (making holiday cookies, woodcarving), a video will provide memories to cherish and honor a loved tradition. Families without video cameras can work with photographs, clippings and scrapbooks.

Since the ideal model of family is one where each person matters, the family unit can provide guidance for being open and accepting of other kinds of people as well. As families blend and extend, we can choose to grow into a broader, more inclusive experience of living. Championing diversity is a complex task, yet vital in maintianing a culture's health. Let us begin at home.

Helen Burns Graham is a freelance media consultant and a member of the Media and Values *Speakers Team. Her blended family includes seven grown children.*

WATCH, READ, LISTEN

Resources for Follow-up

IN PRINT

• ***Ethnic and Racial Images in American Film and Television,*** by Allen L. Woll and Randall M. Miller, brings together research on all of America's ethnic and racial groups from a variety of disciplines and a wide variety of scholarly and popular journals. Garland Publishing, Inc., 136 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016, (212)686-7492, $40.

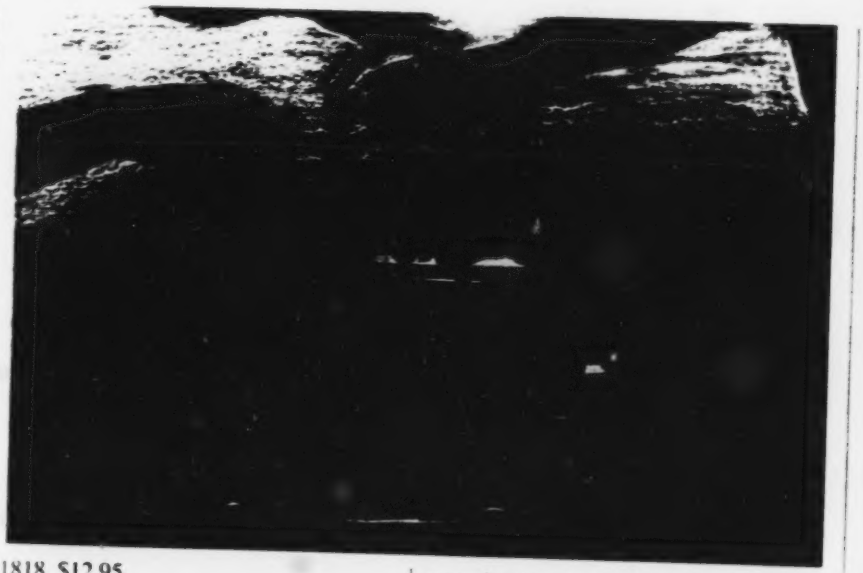
• Dr. S. Robert Lichter and Dr. Linda S. Lichter's study, ***Television's Impact on Ethnic and Racial Images,*** examines the relationship between television viewing and attitudes toward ethnic and racial groups. American Jewish Committee, 165 E. 56th, New York, NY 10022, (212)751-4000.

• Clint Wilson and Félix Gutiérrez explore media's past, present and future relationship with America's racial minorities in ***Minorities and Media: Diversity and the End of Mass Communication.*** Sage Publications Inc., 2111 W. Hillcrest Dr., Newbury Park, CA 91320, (805)499-0721, $12.50

• In ***Small Voices and Great Trumpets: Minorities and the Media,*** editor Bernard Rubin presents a balanced collection of essays examining minority portrayal and employment in the media. Praeger/Greenwood Press, 88 Post Rd. W., Westport, CT 06881, (203)226-3571, $18.95.

• In ***Hollywood's Image of the Jew,*** author Lester Friedman probes the unique historical connection between decades of film images and a minority group that has been intimately involved with the movie industry from its very beginnings. Frederic Ungar Publishing Co., 370 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017, (212)473-7885, $8.95.

• In ***Hollywood and the Catholic Church: The Images of Roman Catholicism in American Movies,*** Les and Barbara Keyser highlight the Church's "coexistence, commingling and competition" with an art form that often reflects the problems of Catholic life in America. Loyola University Press, 3441 N. Ashland Ave., Chicago, IL 60657, (312)281-1818, $12.95.



• ***The Hollywood Indian: Stereotypes of Native Americans in Film*** by John O'Connor, explores "society's perceptions of Native Americans as influenced by movies." New Jersey State Museum, 205 W. State St., Trenton, NJ 08625, (609)292-6464, $6.

• ***The 1987 Hollywood Writers' Report: A Survey of Ethnic, Gender, and Age Employment Practices,*** describes how the door to access and opportunity in Hollywood is all but closed to writers who are ethnic minorities, women, and those over 40 years of age. Researched by Dr. William T. Bielby and Dr. Denise D. Bielby of the University of California, Santa Barbara. Writers Guild of America, West, 8955 Beverly Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90048, (213)550-1000, no charge as long as available.

• ***Television and the Socialization of the Minority Child,*** Gordon L. Berry and Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, eds., brings together research from several disciplines on TV's effects on minority children. Academic Press, Inc., 111 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003, 1(800)321-5068, $43.50.

• ***Media&Values Issue #38,*** "Cracking the Color Code: Minorities in Media." An examination of minorities' media images, this issue delves into the problems of racial biases, stereotypes, and prejudices. *Media&Values*, 1962 S. Shenandoah, Los Angeles, CA 90007, (213)559-2944, single copy, $4, 2-12 copies, $3.25 ea.

SIGHT/SOUND

• ***Arab Stereotypes in America*** This slide show (with taped narration) focuses on negative images of Arabs in the mass media, popular literature and textbooks. Rental: $20. American/Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, 1731 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, DC 20009, (202)797-7662.

• ***Black History: Lost/Stolen/Strayed.*** This CBS News Production, featuring Bill Cosby, examines the real history of black Americans compared to media images. Purchase: $820/16mm, $475/video. Distributed by BFA Educational Media, 468 Park Ave., New York, NY 10016. Also check your library.

• ***Passion and Memory*** traces the history of blacks in film through examination of the lives of five famous actors and actresses. For further information, contact Roy Campanella, Jr., Morningstar Productions, Inc., 256 S. Robertson Blvd.,

MEDIA WATCH
With an Eye to Values

Beverly Hills, CA 90211. (213)460-7536.

• ***Acts of Hate,*** a radio program presented by California Tomorrow, is available on cassette. The documentary focuses on racial, ethnic, religious and minority motivated vandalism and violence. Radio Project California Tomorrow, 849 South Broadway, Suite 831, Los Angeles, CA 90014. (213)623-6231. $5.

ORGANIZATIONS

• ***American Jewish Committee's Center for Ethnicity, Behavior and Communications,*** 165 East 56th, New York, NY 10022. (212)751-4000.

• ***Democratic Council on Ethnic Americans,*** Democratic National Committee, 430 South Capitol Street SE, Washington, DC 20003. (202)863-8000.

• ***Italian American Media Institute,*** The City of New York Graduate Center, 33 West 42nd Street, New York, NY 10036. (212)382-0627.

• ***American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee,*** 1731 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20009. (202)797-7662.

• ***B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League,*** 823 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017. (212)490-2525.

• ***National Association of Hispanic Journalists,*** National Press Building, Suite 634, Washington, DC 20045. (202)783-6228.

• ***National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations,*** 555 Madison Avenue, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10022. (212)838-9423.

• ***National Italian American Foundation/Media Institute,*** 666 11th Street NW, Ste. 800, Washington, DC. (202)638-0220.

• ***Native American Public Broadcasting Consortium,*** P.O. Box 83111, Lincoln, NE 68501. (402)472-3522.

• ***Asian-Pacific American Media Watch,*** 1010 S. Flower, Suite 302, Los Angeles, CA 90015. (213)746-7016.

• ***National Black Media Coalition,*** 38 New York Ave., Washington, DC 20002. (202)387-8155.

● The plot of *Magic Town*, a 1947 movie starring Jane Wyman and Jimmy Stewart, turned on the perfect demographics of an American small town. An idyllic place, unchanged for decades, it was supposed to represent American society so perfectly that polls taken there would reflect the whole country. Need it be said? This "typical town" was lily white. Obviously, our media has changed since the days when not being typical was as good as being invisible. But has the change been as far reaching as we have hoped?

● "If Columbo had been called Greenberg, his prospects wouldn't have been so good."
— Satirist/director David Steinberg, explaining why Hollywood executives are nervous about Jewish characters.

● Do media and societal attitudes still affect self-esteem among minorities? It would seem so, according to a study of black preschoolers reported by the American Psychological Association. Researchers found that young black children preferred white Cabbage Patch dolls to black ones. Results in the mid-1980s were very similar to those of a landmark '50s study that helped to fuel the Civil Rights movement.

● Another white ethnic group, Poles and Eastern Europeans, has had a limited visibility, according to historians Allen L. Woll and Randall M. Miller. Once almost invisible, they have emerged, but are still mostly limited to blue collar stereotypes, the pair conclude in their study *Ethnic and Racial Images on Film and Television*. "Like the character Latka on *Taxi*, who lacks a distinct nationality because he stands for all Eastern Europeans, they lack the clarity, complexity and diversity that only a close reading of history and appreciation of social change can provide. For the moment, the Eastern Europeans on screen will still be wearing hardhats."

● Students in a metropolitan reporting class taught by *Newsday* editor Robin Reisig at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism reach beyond objectivity to explore their own backgrounds and those of others. Assignments include time spent in various New York neighborhoods and stories on groups far removed from students' own roots. As one put it, "I understand Anglo reporters a little better now. I can see how disadvantaged they are when it comes to knowing people of different backgrounds."

● Ethnic groups have awakened to the need to accentuate the positive, and various awards programs—the NAACP's Image Award, Nosotros' Eagle, the Jimmy awarded by the Association of Asian-Pacific Artists—have become specialized Oscars honoring positive TV and film images of their respective groups. Only one problem—sometimes there are no positive images to honor. When the Hispanic Media Image Task Force presented its Imagen Award to Jimmy Smits of *L.A. Law*, its awards committee complained that no other portrayal met its criteria for non-stereotypical performances.

● The powerful stereotypes in *The Godfather* and its successors even influenced mob criminals' views of themselves, according to New York State Attorney Rudolph Giulini. When he compared before and after tape recordings of testimony, he found that suspects interviewed after the movie's release sounded more like its characters than they had before. One of them was so impressed by the film that he played a tape of its theme over and over in his car, Giulini said.

ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

Italian Americans Create New Image

Instead of always focusing on the brood of gangsters with Italian names, why not concentrate on the many successful business leaders, lawyers, judges, doctors and teachers from an Italian heritage?

That question was asked in frustration in an early 1987 issue of the newsletter of the Coalition of Italo-American Associations, an umbrella group of 130 organizations based in the New York area..

It was asked again in anticipation, as those same organizations looked forward to the inagural episode of *Italics: The Italian-American Magazine*, a cable program that aired for the first time on the New York City cable system in the spring of 1988.

The show's first program demonstrated its positive perspective:

- a visit to the Garibaldi-Meucci Museum on Staten Island to highlight the hero of Italy's unification and inventor Antonio Meucci;
- an interview with travel executive and community leader, William Denis Fugazy;
- an appearance with excerpts and comments by filmmaker Christine Noschese from her award-winning documentary film, *Metropolitan Avenue*.

Community leaders, artists, legislators, law enforcement officials and the lively life of the Italian-American community will provide subject matter for future episodes, according to Joseph V. Scelsa, Ph.D., director of the John D. Calandra Italian American Institute and series co-host. The monthly program is a co-production of City University of New York-TV and the Italian-American News Institute.

Support from foundations and grants may help, but even with their aid and the benefits of a non-profit production setup, the program's $30,000 per episode cost, with five shows scheduled and more hoped for, represents a major investment for the community.

The opportunity to accentuate the positive by emphasizing the many contributions Italians have made to American culture makes it worthwhile, according to Scelsa. "Negative images die hard, and they have a long life," he notes. "You can't count on merely eradicating them. You need positive alternatives."

Of course, crime is a function of personal greed and not an inherited trait of any ethnic group. But as an Italian American, Scelsa is worried about the media's Italian wise-guy stereotype, as well as the Mafioso criminal. "These characters are funny but they're not usually successful in dealing with life. Even when they're not glorifying crime figures, the media has a tendency to romanticize a lifestyle that's really from 50 years ago. We need to give our youth something that shows how Italian Americans have made successful careers for themselves in today's world."

Although the show will at first be shown only in the New York metropolitan area, television stations in other cities may also be interested in airing its episodes, Scelsa hopes. Videotapes of individual episodes will also be available from the Italian-American News Institute. "We don't know how many New Yorkers watched the first episode but if our distribution plan works, it might eventually reach as many as 750,000 people an episode."

Admittedly, that's not much compared to the millions of people who saw *The Godfather*, or the more recent films with Italian scenarios like *The Untouchables* and *Moonstruck*. But the difference lies in self-control, and in the reality of the image, Scelsa believes.

Italian Americans, like other ethnic groups, are beginning to turn from naysaying to positive efforts to shape the view the media presents of them to the larger society and to themselves. In addition to *Italics*, other community efforts at accentuating the positive have included:

- *Italian Americans and the Law*, a brochure that deals with the Mafia stigma in the context of American society and profiles a number of Italian-American law enforcement officials and judicial leaders. It's the first of a series of educational print pieces commissioned by the coalition and developed by Ron Basci & Associates to focus on leading American citizens with Italian backgrounds.
- A letter-writing campaign urging Italian Americans to write the *New York Times* and the New York *Post* thanking them for recent editorials supporting efforts to reduce stereotyping.
- Proposal for a dramatic television production based on the life and times of Philip Mazzei, an influential aide and confidant of Thomas Jefferson.
- An active educational program to combat stereotyping in the public schools. Including presentation and videotaping of two plays on Italian themes by award winning playwright Mario Fratti.

Ultimately, these efforts demonstrate how an ethnic group can begin to take the question of its image into its own hand. And as they multiply they may bring new images to mind when someone says, "That's Italian."

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